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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000866

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SUBJECT: MASS ARRESTS, TORTURE THREATEN DARFURIS IN KHARTOUM

REF: A. KHARTOUM 847  
¶B. KHARTOUM 859  
¶C. KHARTOUM 857  
¶D. KHARTOUM 788

¶11. (SBU) Summary: Following the May 10 JEM attacks on Omdurman, there are reliable reports that the GoS has detained and tortured thousands of Darfuris living in Khartoum. Sudanese civil society is scrambling to document the names of the detainees, and Sudanese opposition has formed the "May 10 Committee" to provide for their legal defense. End summary.

¶12. (SBU) Sudanese and international human rights organizations confirm that over 250 individuals, ethnic Darfuris resident in Khartoum, are known to be in the custody of Government of Sudan (GoS) authorities following the May 10 Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) attacks in the capital. Currently, all detainees are in the custody of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). Khartoum-based organizations and activists have compiled their names independent of GoS cooperation. Not yet charged, all known detainees sit in holding facilities in the Khartoum area or in a prison on Sudan's Red Sea coast.

¶13. (SBU) In addition, Human rights organizations report "disappearances" of many more unidentified Darfuris following recent raids of neighborhoods in Omdurman, a Khartoum suburb with a large Darfuri population. All released detainees testify to having been beaten and tortured. Most disturbing, several former detainees report that they were released from a military prison, Al Sigin al Harabi, where over 3000 Darfuris allegedly are being held.

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EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS SUGGEST TORTURE, 3000 IN ONE PRISON  
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¶14. (SBU) All of the many arrest accounts following the GoS response to the May 10 attacks involve ethnic profiling and torture by GoS authorities. One story, judged credible by lawyers and a surgeon from a well-known Khartoum-based human rights group, was reported to them by a 25 year-old construction technician working in Khartoum. Although from the Masalit tribe of Darfur, the young man was raised as an IDP in the east of Sudan. On the morning of May 11, while he was taking refuge from the Omdurman fighting with coworkers, the group was arrested by uniformed officers in the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS).

¶15. (SBU) Upon arrival at a police station, NISS officers began interrogating and torturing the group. The young man described being chained to the wall, kicked and punched, beaten in the testicles with water pipes, and subjected to a mock execution - all between 8 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. One of approximately 500 detainees transported to NISS headquarters, he was brought before a captured JEM officer, who was randomly "assisting" NISS in separating JEM

combatants from the crowd. Although the man had never seen the JEM officer before, he was identified as having been part of JEM, and sent with others to Al Sigin al Harabi military prison.

¶16. (SBU) Arriving at the prison, the young man said was put in a room measuring only ten meters by five meters with 247 people. Prisoners received insufficient amounts of food and water, and lacking facilities, detainees urinated and defecated on the floor. The detainee recounted seeing numerous similar rooms at this prison, and estimated that 3000 people were held there, all from Darfur. One lawyer, not affiliated with other witnesses, confirmed these conditions at the prison, and reported that authorities separated the 3000 detainees according to tribal and ethnic affiliation. Conditions at the prison deteriorated for four days, after which they received buckets for bodily functions and barrels of drinking water. After seven days, the young Masalit man was judged as having no affiliation with JEM, and was released on bail. Authorities provided him with money to buy clothes and shoes, and within days he reached out to the human rights organization for medical treatment, where he related his experiences.

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SUDANESE OPPOSITION ORGANIZES FOR LEGAL CHALLENGE  
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¶17. (SBU) Sudanese civil society has quickly coalesced to oppose the arrests and torture. Most prominent is the "National Committee for the Protection and Defense of Individuals/Groups Affected by May 10 Events." Among its 61 prominent signatories are Darfur rebel leader and Government of National Unity Vice President Minni Minawi; SPLM chairman Yassir Arman; and former Sudanese foreign minister and prominent opposition leader Farouk Abu-Essa. The "May 10 Committee"

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aims to provide a political counterweight to the GoS's heavy-handed reaction to the JEM attacks, while also providing legal support for the detainees and financial support for their families.

¶18. (SBU) In an interview with Poloffs at his Khartoum home, Abu-Essa estimated that his organization is mobilizing hundreds of lawyers for eventual legal challenges to the detentions. "The government will continue searching for plotters," Abu-Essa said, "and the number of detainees is increasing day by day." Abu-Essa called the scale of arrests in Khartoum unprecedented, adding that race plays a central role in the motivation behind the arrests. Abu-Essa appealed for international pressure on the GOS to release the names of the Darfuri detainees, and for them to be transferred from NISS custody to that of the Sudanese police, where under Sudanese law they have access to legal recourse.

¶19. Independent legal activists expressed similar hopes for the international community. Speaking with Poloff at the Al-Khatim Adlan Center for Enlightenment and Human Development, human rights lawyers outlined their strategy. Forced by international pressure to release the names of all the detainees, the Sudanese legal system will then have to process the multitude of briefs, bringing it to a halt, and thereby forcing authorities to release detainees not connected with the JEM attacks.

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GOS TRIUMPHANT IN PRESS, CENSORSHIP ON RISE  
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¶110. (SBU) The GoS has adopted a triumphant tone in the press, promising to root out "all JEM supporters," which observers interpret as a threat to all Darfuris living in Khartoum. Censorship continues, with the newspaper "Al-Wahn" still banned from publication, and independent newspapers forced to excise even uncontroversial articles. When one English-language newspaper attempted to print the Department of State's 2008 Trafficking in Persons report for Sudan, NISS censors removed the article before publication. Most ridiculously, an op-ed piece by a GoS official accused Amnesty International of conspiring with Khalil Ibrahim and JEM against the GoS.

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Comment

111. (SBU) Last week's government-orchestrated violence against Darfuri students at Khartoum University (Ref. A) is directly connected with the recent arrests of Darfuris living in the capital.

As evidence emerges that thousands of Darfuris are being detained at an NISS-run mass lock-up on the outskirts of Khartoum, the sheer scale of the arrests indicates that the GoS is responding to the JEM attacks by extending its violent campaign in Darfur indiscriminately to Darfuris living in Khartoum as well. In his speech at the June 8 ceremony presenting the new Abyei accord (Ref. B), Government of National Unity First Vice President Salva Kiir pointedly alluded to the issue and called on his NCP partners to protect the rights of all citizens and not to violate those rights based on ethnic origin.

The GoS may bend to international pressure to release the names of the Darfuri detainees, but it shows no signs of ending its month-long campaign of arrests, torture, harassment and orchestrated violence against Darfuris in Khartoum.

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